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Washington, DC--U.S. Congressman Mike Pence gave the following opening statement today at the first conference committee meeting on Iran sanctions bills passed by the House and Senate:

"Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you for convening this conference committee and I commend the members of this conference committee who have recognized the threat posed by Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons.

"This conference committee has no ordinary task. We have a job to do and history will judge the actions taken by this conference committee and this country. I pray that history will conclude that we rose to the challenge and enacted legislation that led the world to act in concert against the rising threat of a nuclear Iran. I will also pray that history will not conclude that our failure to lead boldly ended in a flash of light, the rush of wind and a second historic tragedy for our most cherished ally. The stakes are that high.

"We must make certain that the prospect of an Iranian regime armed with nuclear weapons never materializes. As President Obama noted last year in Prague, a nuclear Iran will 'increase insecurity for all.' One year later, Iran's nuclear program is accelerating and we draw ever closer to the reality of Iran as a nuclear power.

"As we have seen for the last sixteen months, diplomacy and engagement have had no real impact on Tehran. Deadlines set by President Obama have passed without any change in Iran's behavior and the United Nations has demonstrated no serious leadership on this issue.

"Secretary of Defense Gates has noted that we do not have a real long-term strategy to stop Iran from realizing its nuclear ambitions.

"Frankly, this Administration has spent more time on global warming than on the growing threat of a nuclear Iran. The Nuclear Security Summit, recently held here in Washington, D.C., did not bring us any closer to imposing tough sanctions on Iran despite the fact that Iran's continued pursuit of nuclear weapons and its support for terrorism remain the single most pressing proliferation threat.

"As members of the conference committee, we must report the strongest possible Iran Sanctions bill back to the Congress to force the Iranian regime to give up its weapons program or face crippling economic isolation. We must resist efforts to weaken the sanctions in this legislation to accommodate diplomatic concerns. We must resist efforts to include carve-outs and waivers that will dilute the effectiveness of our action.

"And lastly, we must remember that time is of the essence. As instructed by a bipartisan majority in the House, I urge my colleagues on this committee to bear down and complete our work by May 28, only a few weeks from now.

"There are some in diplomatic circles and within this Administration who undoubtedly want to see this committee and this process slowed down, but as our military's leaders recently testified before Congress, time is running short. The Iranian regime soon will not only possess a nuclear weapon, but it continues to test the means with which to deliver it against the United States or our allies. We must act boldly and we must act quickly.

"Given the long history of state-sponsored terrorism by the regime in Tehran, and given the threat to our security and our most cherished ally Israel, this is life and death."